

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 NSAE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00

USIE-00 INRE-00 AID-20 IO-12 EUR-25 PM-09 H-02 INR-10

L-03 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-15 OMB-01 RSR-01

DPW-01 /129 W

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O R 270430 Z APR 73

FM AMCONSUL BIEN HOA

TO AMEMBASSY SAIGON IMMEDIATE

INFO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0007

DAO SAIGON IMMEDIATE

RUMTBK / AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 0007

AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

MACTHAI BANGKOK

AMCONSUL DA NANG

AMCONSUL CAN THO

AMCONSUL NHA TRANG

USDEL FRANCE

CINCPAC HICKAM AFB HI

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 BIEN HOA 0093

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINTS MOPS VC

SUBJECT: CURRENT STRENGTH AND INTENTIONS OF BELLIGERENTS IN MR3

SUMMARY: COMMUNIST MILITARY STRENGTH IN MR3 IS GROWING SLOWLY. THE LIKELIHOOD OF THE COMMUNISTS LAUNCHING A MAJOR OFFENSIVE IN THE NEAR FUTURE, HOWEVER, IS DIMINISHING, ALTHOUGH WE FORESEE CONTINUED HARASSING ATTACKS. WE BELIEVE THEY INTEND TO PROTECT AND REPOPULATE TERRITORY THEY ALREADY HOLD. IF POLITICAL COMPETITION FROM THIS NEW POWER BASE PROVES UNREWARDING, WE EXPECT THE COMMUNISTS TO FALL BACK ON THEIR ONLY ALTERNATIVE -- RENEWED NVA BUILDUPS AND A RESUMPTION OF MAIN FORCE WARFARE. END OF SUMMARY.

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1. AS A RESULT OF RECENT CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN THE CONSUL GENERAL, III CORPS LTG NGUYEN VAN MINH, AND OTHERS, MUCH NEW INFORMATION HAS COME TO OUR ATTENTION.

2. COMMUNIST STRENGTH WITHIN MR3 AS OF APRIL 25, 1973, INCLUDES 22,900 NVA MAIN FORCE TROOPS, 14,650 LOCAL FORCE TROOPS (60-80 PERCENT NVA), AND 1,900 GUERRILLAS (VC). TO THESE 39,450 COMBAT TROOPS MUST BE ADDED COMMUNIST POLITICAL CADRE (9,200) AND REAR SERVICE CADRE (22,300), A TOTAL OF 31,500 CADREMEN, WHICH, WHEN ADDED TO THE 39,450 COMBAT TROOPS, GIVES A TOTAL COMMUNIST STRENGTH IN MR3 OF 70,950. (THIS DOES NOT INCLUDE THE FOUR- FIVE THOUSAND RELEASED PRISONERS OF WAR EARLIER REPORTED UNDERGOING REINDOCTRINATION IN THE NORTHWEST CORNER OF TAY NINH PROVINCE.) THIS REPRESENTS INCREASES SINCE JANUARY 28, 1973, OF 4,350 NVA MAIN FORCE TROOPS, 1,510 LOCAL FORCE TROOPS, 110 GUERRILLAS, 1,000 POLITICAL CADRE, AND 1,500 REAR SERVICE CADRE. THE TOTAL INCREASE IN COMMUNIST STRENGTH IN MR3 SINCE JANUARY 28, 1973, IS 12,900, INCLUDING 12,000 NEW NVA TROOPS INFILTRATED INTO MR3, 500 NEW LOCAL RECRUITS, AND 400 NEWLY RELEASED POW'S (20 PERCENT OF THE 2,013 ACTUALLY RELEASED BY THE GRVN IN MR3). THIS INCREASE IS PARTIALLY OFFSET BY THE 3,400 COMMUNIST CASUALTIES SINCE JANUARY 28, 1973, AND BY THE TRANSFER OF THE 272/ CT9 REGIMENT (1,000 TROOPS) TO MR4. THE NET INCREASE IN NVA/ VC STRENGTH IN MR3 SINCE JANUARY 28, 1973, IS THEREFORE 8,470. A COMPLETE ORDER OF BATTLE BY PROVINCE DOWN TO THE PLATOON LEVEL FOLLOWS BY SEPARATE AIRGRAM.

3. AGAINST THIS ARRAY THE GRVN HAD DEPLOYED 61,380 ARVN, 67,662 RF, AND 24,945 PF, FOR A TOTAL OF 163,987 REGULARS AND TERRITORIALS. 40,901 OF THE ARVN ARE IN THE 5 TH, 18 TH AND 25 TH DIVISIONS; THE REST ARE IN RANGER AND AIRBORNE UNITS AND SUPPORT ELEMENTS. COMBAT PSDF NUMBERING 280,691 BRING THE GRVN COMBAT FORCES UP TO A TOTAL OF 444,678. SUPPORT PSDF COUNTED AT 849,464 (FOR A TOTAL OF 1,130,155 PSDF) BRING THE GRAND TOTAL OF GRVN FORCES IN MR3 TO 1,294,142.

4. FROM 0800 JANUARY 28, 1973, TO 0800 APRIL 21, 1973, THE GRVN HAS REPORTED 2,762 COMMUNIST CEASE- FIRE VIOLATIONS, INCLUDING 1,224 INDIRECT FIRE ATTACKS, 972 GROUND ASSAULTS, 235 DIRECT FIRE
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HARASSING ATTACKS, 156 INCIDENTS OF SABOTAGE, 38 INCIDENTS OF TERRORISM, 38 ATTACKS AGAINST AIRCRAFT BY GROUND FIRE, AND 99 INCIDENTS OF INFILTRATION INTO GRVN- CONTROLLED HAMLETS.

5. CURRENT GRVN OPERATIONAL PLANS ARE PURELY DEFENSIVE AND UNIT COMMANDERS HAVE ORDERS TO CONDUCT OPERATIONS ONLY IN RESPONSE TO COMMUNIST ATTACK. THERE ARE NO PLANS TO RELIEVE TONG LE CHAN RANGER BASE. MINOR ENGAGEMENTS CONTINUE IN THE PHUOC TUY/ LONG KHANH BORDER AREA, WHERE COMMUNIST FORCES ARE TRYING TO DRIVE OFF GRVN FORCES WHO SITE ASTRIDE AN IMPORTANT LOC NECESSARY TO THE SUPPORT OF COMMUNIST CADRE AND OPERATIONS IN BIEN HOA PROVINCE AND THE RUNG SAT SPECIAL ZONE.

6. WHILE GRVN DEPOLYMENTS ON THE PHUOC TUY/ LONG KHANH BORDER HELP PROTECT SAIGON'S RIGHT FLANK, SAIGON'S LEFT FLANK IS WELL

DEFENDED AGAINST RELATIVELY WEAK COMMUNIST PRESSURE BY STRONG, HIGHLY MOTIVATED TERRITORIAL FORCES IN LONG AN, HAU NGHIA AND WESTERN TAY NINH.

7. THE BULK OF COMMUNIST FORCES IS ARRAYED AGAINST SAIGON'S FRONT, FROM WESTERN PHUOC LONG THROUGH BINH DUONG AND BINH LONG TO EASTERN TAY NINH, AND ALL ALONG THE SAIGON RIVER CORRIDOR. GRVN FORCES ARE HEAVILY DEPLOYED AGAINST THIS PRINCIPAL THREAT IN AN ARC JUST OUTSIDE THE GIA DINH BORDER FROM BIEN HOW CITY TO THE NORTHEAST OF SAIGON TO TRANG BANG(HAU NGHIA PROVINCE) ON THE NORTHWEST. ADDITIONAL GRVN CONCENTRATIONS PROTECT POCKETS AND SALIENTS AT TAY NINH CITY, CHON THANH AND AN LOC (BINH LONG PROVINCE) AND SONG BE (PHUOC LONG PROVINCE).

8. THIS COMMUNIST DEPLOYMENT, POISED LIKE A KNIFE OVER SAIGON'S HEAD, COULD SUPPORT A MAJOR DRIVE DIRECTLY AGAINST SAIGON AT ANY TIME. WE CONSIDER SUCH A GENERAL OFFENSIVE UNLIKELY IN THE NEAR FUTURE, HOWEVER. ALTHOUGH, AS IS SO OFTEN THE CASE IN VIET- NAM, THERE IS MORE THAN ONE THEORY THAT EXPLAINS THE OBSERVABLE FACTS, WE BELIEVE THE FOLLOWING SCENARIO MOST PLAUSIBLY ACCOUNTS FOR RECENT EVENTS AND CURRENT INTELLIGENCE REPORTS:

9. THE LATEST MAP OF SOUTH VIET- NAM SHOWS LARGE CHUNKS OF REAL ESTATE UNDER COMMUNIST CONTROL IN MR3. A PLASTIC OVERLAY SHOWING POPULATION DISTRIBUTION WOULD SHOW THAT MOST OF THE PEOPLE LIVE
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IN GRVN- CONTROLLED TERRITORY. ALTHOUGH THE GRVN ALSO CONTROLS THE BEST RICE LAND, ANOTHER PLASTIC OVERLAY SHOWING ARABLE LAND, SOIL CHARACTERISTICS AND NATURAL RESOURCES WOULD SHOW THAT COMMUNIST- CONTROLLED TERRITORY WILL SUSTAIN ECONOMICALLY A SIZEABLE POPULATION.

10. THEREFORE, COMMUNIST PLANS FOR THE NEXT 12 MONTHS, WE SUSPECT, CALL FOR: (A) PROTECTING THE TERRITORY THEY ALREADY HOLD; (B) REPOPULATING IT; (C) COMPETING POLITICALLY WITH THIS NEW POPULATION AS A BASE; (D) COUNTINUING THE CURRENT LEVEL OF HARASSMENT; AND (E) LAUNCHING NEW OFFENSIVES IF THE RESULTS OF POLITICAL COMPETITION ARE UNACCEPTABLE.

11. PROTECTION. THE NATURE OF THE RECENT LIMITED BUILDUP IN NVA FORCES IN THIS REGION SEEMS DESIGNED TO STRENGTHEN COMMUNIST FORCES TO REPEL POSSIBLE ATTACKS BY A MORE AGGRESSIVE ARVN; IT LACKS THE OVERWHELMING MAGNITUDE NECESSARY TO A SUCCESSFUL GENERAL OFFENSIVE. THIS DEFENSIVE POSTURE, IN OUR VIEW, DOES NOT PRECLUDE ATTACKS AND LIMITED OFFENSIVE ACTIONS, JUST AS US FORCES EMPLOY " AGRESSIVE PATROLLING" AS A DEFENSIVE TACTIC. TRACTS OF COMMUNIST- CONTROLLED TERRITORY MAY BE MADE MORE DEFENSIBLE BY ADDING MORE REAL ESTATE TO THAT ALREADY CONTROLLED, JUST AS ISRAEL GREATLY SIMPLIFIED ITS DEFENSE PROBLEMS AND GREATLY SHORTENED ITS PERIMETERS BY ADDING SINAI AND THE WEST BANK TO THE TERRITORY UNDER ITS CONTROL. LIKEWISE, A DEFENSIVE POSTURE

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DOES NOT PRECLUDE PHYSICAL PRESSURE APPLIED AT SELECTED SITES TO REINFORCE A POLITICAL POINT, OR TO RETALIATE AGAINST A GRVN GROUND, AIR OR ARTILLERY ATTACK. IN FACT, IF THE COMMUNISTS ARE TO LURE PEOPLE BACK TO COMMUNIST- CONTROLLED TERRITORY, THEY MUST PROTECT IT FROM THE ARTILLERY AND AIR STRIKES THAT DROVE MOST OF THE POPULATION AWAY IN THE FIRST PLACE. THIS PROBABLY ACCOUNTS FOR CONNUMIST EMPHASIS ON ANIT- AIRCRAFT WEAPONRY; SOME CURRENT (E. G., TONG LE CHAN) AND FUTURE COMMUNIST ATTACKS MAY BE DESIGNED, AT LEAST IN PART, TO PUNISH THE GRVN FOR AIR OR ARTILLERY STRIKES ON COMMUNIST TURF. WE WILL, THEREFORE, CONTINUE TO SEE NVA/ VC PRESSURE ON GRVN- CONTROLLED POCKETS AND SALIENTS IN COMMUNIST- CONTROLLED TERRITORY, SUCH AS TONG LE CHAN, SONG BE, AN LOC AND CHON THANH, TOGETHER WITH SCATTERED ATTACKS TO PUNISH THE GRVN FOR STRIKES AGAINST

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COMMUNIST TERRITORY AND TO REMIND THE CIVILIAN POPULATION ELSEWHERE THAT THE COMMUNISTS ARE STILL DEADLY. THE ATTACKS WILL LIKELY BE COORDINATED TO STRIKE SEVERAL PLACES AT ONCE,

THUS COMPLICATING GRVN'S DEFENSES, AND CONSTITUTING WHAT IN THE PAST HAVE BEEN CALLED " HIGH POINTS."

12. REPOPULATION. THIS COMMUNIST PROGRAM HAS ALREADY BEGUN; IN NORTHERN TAY NINH, BINH DUONG, BINH LONG AND THE RICE BOWL AREA OF LONG KHANH, COMMUNISTS ARE OFFERING THREE HECTARES OF LAND AND A HOUSE FREE TO ANYONE WHO WILL MOVE FROM GRVN- CONTROLLED TERRITORY TO COMMUNIST- CONTROLLED TERRITORY. NEITHER BELLIGERENT IN THIS CONFLICT HAS EVER REALLY ACCEPTED THE WHAM CONCEPT; EACH TRULY BELIEVES IN CONTROLLING PEOPLE RATHER THAN " WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS." THEREFORE, EACH VIETNAMESE OF VOTING AGE WHO CROSSES FROM GRVN TO COMMUNIST- CONTROLLED TERRITORY CEASES TO BE A GRVN- CONTROLLED PERSON AND A PRO- GRVN VOTE, AND BECOMES A COMMUNIST- CONTROLLED PERSON AND A PRO- COMMUNIST VOTE. THE GRVN, NATURALLY, IS MAKING EVERY EFFORT TO PREVENT SUCH LINE- CROSSING, WITH SOME SUCCESS.

13. POLITICAL COMPETITION. IF THE COMMUNISTS SUCCEED IN REPOPULATING THEIR TERRITORY, THEY WOULD BE IN A POSITION TO ACQUIRE A LARGE SHARE OF THE POLITICAL POWER IN A NEW, FAIRLY- ELECTED SOUTH VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT, OR TO BARGAIN FOR A FAVORABLE COALITION IN AN UNELECTED GOVERNMENT.

14. RENEWED WARFARE. IF THE COMMUNISTS FAIL IN THEIR BARGAINING FROM A NEW POSITION OF POLITICAL STRENGTH TO RECEIVE AN ACCEPTABLE SHARE OF POLITICAL POWER IN SOUTH VIET- NAM, WE WOULD ASSURE THAT THEY WOULD INVOKE THE ONLY OTHER OPTION OPEN TO THEM; NEW BUILDUPS IN NVA STRENGTH AND NEW MAJOR NVA/ VC OFFENSIVE.

15. IF THE EVIDENCE WE HAVE SEEN CAN BE BELIEVED, THEN SAIGON MUST BE WILLING TO HORSE TRADE WITH THE COMMUNISTS FOR A FAIR- SIZED PIECE OF THE ACTION IN SOUTH VIET- NAM OR FACE RESUMPTION OF MAIN FORCE WARFARE BY LATE 1973 OR EARLY 1974. IF THE EVIDENCE WE HAVE SEEN OF COMMUNIST INTENTIONS HAS BEEN PLANTED, IS OTHERWISE DECEPTIVE, OR HAS BEEN MISINTERPRETED, THERE WILL BE MAIN FORCE WARFARE VERY SOON, PROBABLY BEFORE THE RAINY SEASON (END OF MAY).

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16. WE CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT THE GRVN FORCES POSSESS THE CAPABILITY TO COMBAT THE COMMUNISTS SHOULD THEY ELECT TO LAUNCH AN OFFENSIVE. WE WOULD BE CONCERNED, HOWEVER, IF THE COMMUNISTS WERE TO INTRODUCE EXTERNAL FORCES AND ARMOR NOW POISED IN CAMBODIA JUST OVER THE BORDER FROM TAY NINH PROVINCE. WALKINSHAW

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DAO SAIGON
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